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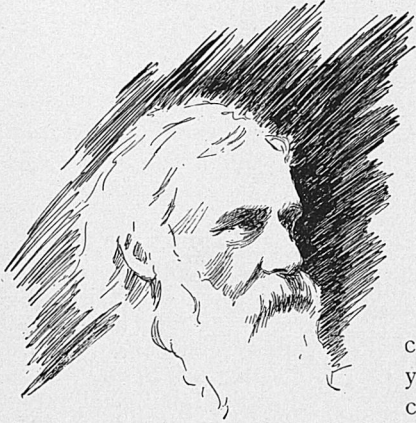
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THE VISTA THROUGH THE SHADOW

By MARY T. EARLE

With original illustrations by S. M. Wilson.

HE had never been out of his own country, yet he always hoped that sometime his country would send him away upon some confidential errand. He began hoping it when he was a boy and he kept on hoping it when he was an old man, so that he grew into the habit of thinking of himself as The Foreign Representative.



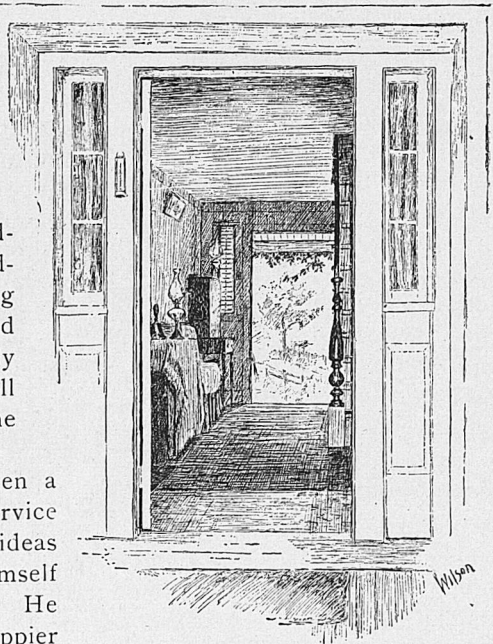
THE FOREIGN REPRESENTATIVE

As the years passed he came to have a great many habits. If he had suddenly lost them his friends would have been lonely, for there was something sweet and gentle in them all. He had his favorite little nooks and corners about the place, and you could tell just where to find him at certain hours, or at least you could be sure that if you did not find him where you looked first, he would be in the place that came before it or after it in his daily schedule. When he came up to the house, too, if you had not known his slow, thoughtful step so well, you

would have known the little pause he always made by the door as he looked through the house to the light beyond. He called it the vista through the shadow.

The Representative's daughter and his wife were both rather young. People always said, "his daughter and his wife," because of the two his daughter was rather the better acquainted with him. His wife had always been so much younger and so much older than he that they seemed to have very little in common to talk about except their fondness for each other. It was a genuine fondness, but they had been married long enough to have said nearly all that needed to be said about it, and so she staid quietly among her books and a kindly silence fell between them. It was different with the child.

The Foreign Representative had been a home representative and had done good service more than once. But now, either his ideas had come to be old-fashioned, or he himself was considered too old for active life. He began to see that his people were happier without much help from him, and that was why

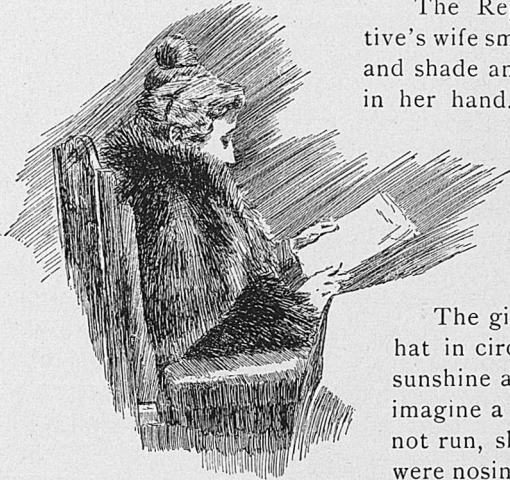


THE VISTA THROUGH THE SHADOW

he staid at home and fell into all his pleasant settled ways.

One day his daughter passed through the vista of the shadow with a letter in her hand. Her bright eyes seemed impatient of her feet, she was so full of eagerness.

"I think," she had said to her mother, "I think that papa will have called the colts up into the lane by the barn to pet them. I'll bring him back if it is anything worth while, and I'm sure it is."



AND HIS WIFE

lifted up their heads and looked at her in perplexity, because, instead of making one of them, she called her father away, waving some insignificant white summons at him with her right hand, as soon as she came in sight.

"Nothing of importance," and yet he left them when they of the things he had hidden in his act like this, and they looked

The Representative read the the house without a word. His daughter started to follow him and then stood still. It was not his habit to act like this, and *she* looked after him with young troubled eyes: she looked after him a moment and then she ran and caught him by the hand.

He turned and gave her a short abstracted glance. "I am going to tell your

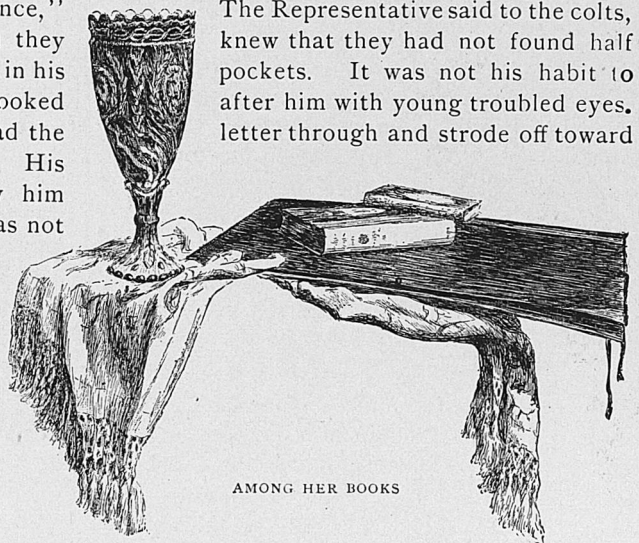


THE REPRESENTATIVE'S DAUGHTER

The Representative's wife smiled as the girl went out through sunlight and shade and summer greenness, swinging her hat in her hand. The Representative's wife might be older and younger than her husband, but she was very much the same age with her child, which was strange, since the child understood and she did not,—but then she knew that she did not understand.

The girl ran down the hillside swinging her hat in circles so that it caught itself full of the sunshine and then of the shade. You could not imagine a girl like that in a place where she could not run, she was so like the round-eyed colts that were nosing about her father. The Representative was there, just as she expected, and the colts

The Representative said to the colts, knew that they had not found half pockets. It was not his habit to after him with young troubled eyes, letter through and strode off toward



AMONG HER BOOKS

mother," he said. "I do not know what she will think of it."

There was no doubt that it was something important if the girl and the colts must wait, for it was not their custom to wait at all. At least they could consult with one another about it, so the girl took her father's place in the lane; but she was only a makeshift in their estimation, not a substitute, for there was nothing but a crumpled ribbon in her pocket.

The Representative hurried on, seeing nothing that was around him until he reached the house. At the door, almost unconsciously he paused. As he stood there looking into the vista through the shadow, it grew so beautiful and so dear to him that he forgot to go inside.

When his wife came out to meet him there were tears in his eyes. "What is it?" she cried anxiously. "What has happened?"

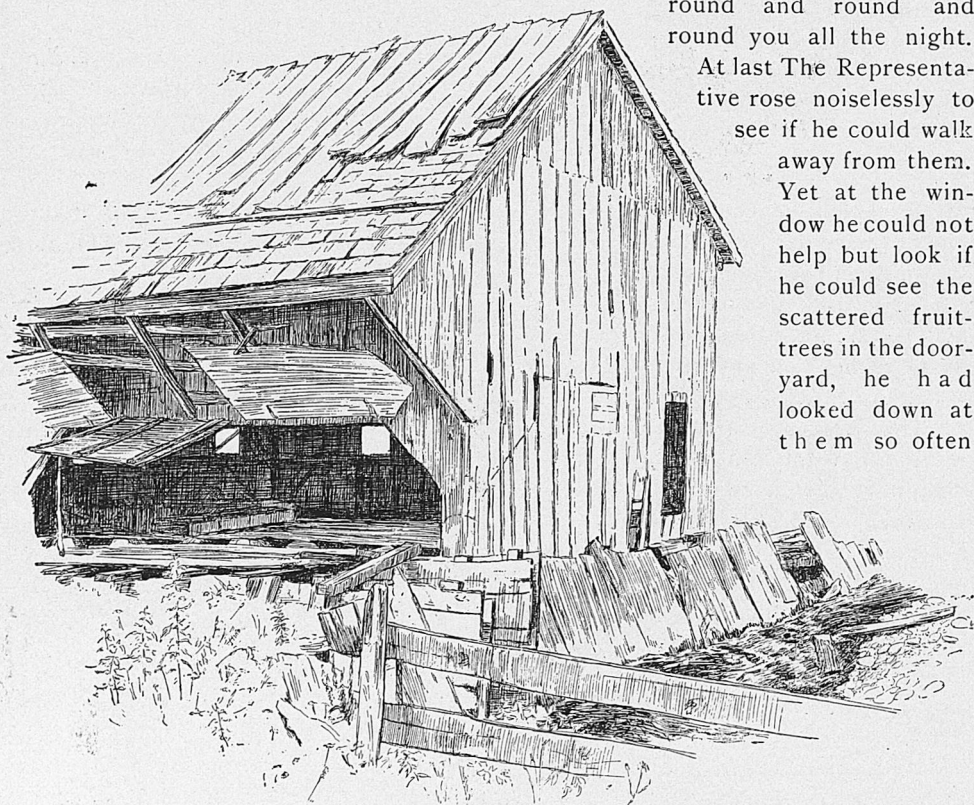
"I—I am a foreign representative," he said.

The tears glimmered in her eyes, too, and she bent her head. "Have you told the child?" she asked.

That night The Representative could not sleep. His mind was errant, or else the old place itself was errant, for round and round each other they circled, and he did not try to keep them still. The spots he loved had grown so human to him that the most prosaic of them meant something beyond its prosaic value, and he had plans for them all. But your friends tire you when they circle

round and round and round you all the night.

At last The Representative rose noiselessly to see if he could walk away from them. Yet at the window he could not help but look if he could see the scattered fruit-trees in the doorway, he had looked down at them so often



THE BARN ON THE HILLSIDE

and seen them bending white and silent beneath him, laden with the still snow of winter or the fluttering snow of spring.

The moon was just creeping above a black drift of clouds that did not look like clouds, but like a wind-swept sea. When he was a boy he had once seen the moon rising like that above the black sea, and he had said to himself, "I will cross that sea," and he had been "the foreign representative" ever since. He stood quite still and watched until the moon rose high and clear into the tranquil depths of night. Then he stole back to his bed and fell asleep, but as he fell asleep he murmured, "I will cross that sea."

It was a very foreign land to which The Representative was sent. At least, in spite of all his joy, he found it so sometimes, and came in wearily. People did not do things there as he had learned to do them. He felt that what he did looked awkward in these foreign eyes, and yet he could not tell that things would seem awkward until after they were done. He was very happy to be there, but he seemed to himself much older and more out of date than he had ever seemed at home. It was not so with his daughter; she had a child's way of belonging wherever she might be, and he realized that he was much older than she,—he began to feel as old as his wife.

One day when he came in, feeling shrinking and sensitive with the knowledge that he was a stranger, his wife looked up at him from the book which she was always reading, just as she had always been reading at home. When she saw his face she came across to him and laid her hands upon his shoulders.

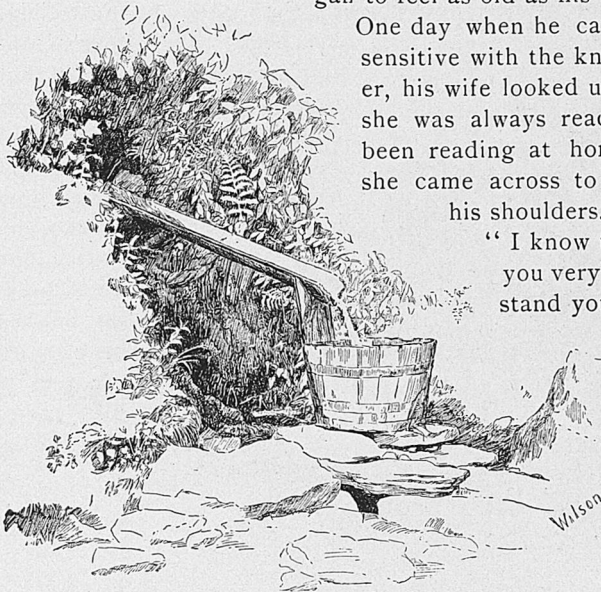
"I know that I have never understood you very well," she said, "but I understand you now. Do you know that you are homesick?"

"I am tired," said The Representative, "I think that is all. I am very happy to be here."

"You are not happy as the child is happy," his wife answered, "but perhaps you can be as happy as I am, if you will come with me."



THE WHITE MOON



THE SPOTS HE LOVED HAD GROWN HUMAN TO HIM

"I am afraid that even you cannot make me young, dear," sighed The Representative. "I am beginning to see that this has come too late. You and I are growing old, and yes—perhaps I am a little homesick. I have come too late." His wife laughed in a way that made her seem like the child, and gave him an unexpected caress. "It makes me feel young to be of an age with you," she said, "but come, I want you to see something that I have found," and they

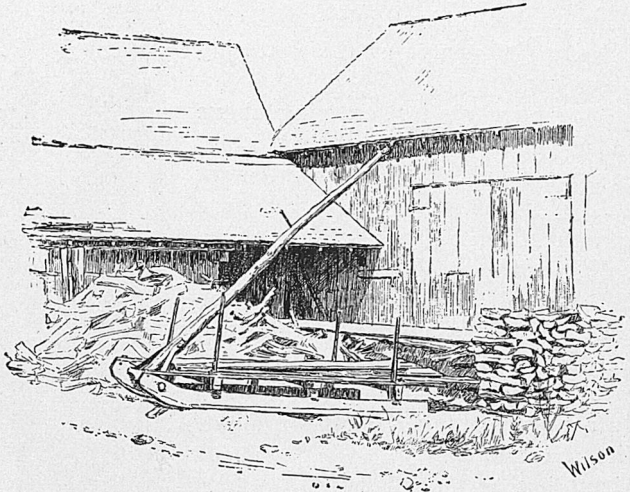
went out, walked together and looked about them comfortably in the foreign country.

Nothing seemed so foreign to them when they walked together as it had when they were apart, and The Representative said "It is very home-like for us two to be going along side by side."

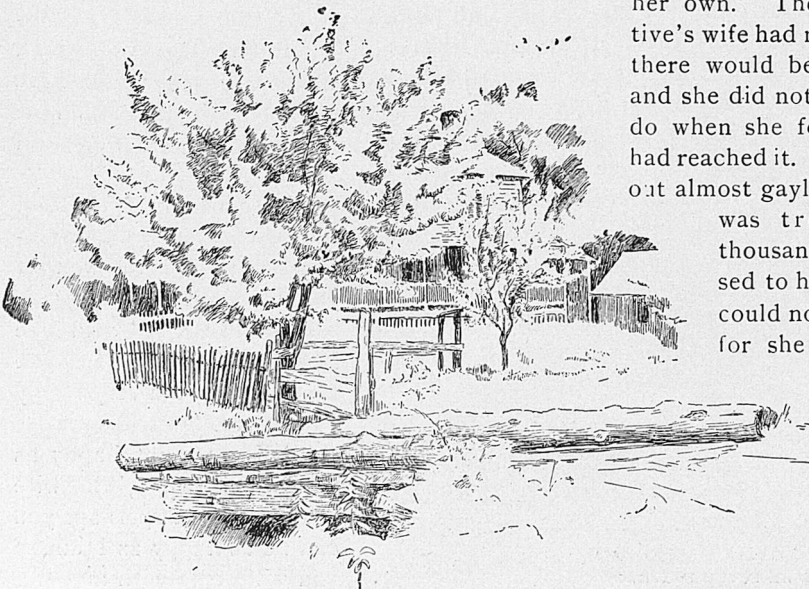
His wife did not answer. She was remembering that at home they had never gone side by side. He had not asked her, and she had not asked him—it had been so quiet and easy not to ask. She felt that she was very like the place to which she was taking him, a place which he had often seen, but at which he had never looked.

For the least self-assertive of women there comes a time when she must claim

her own. The Representative's wife had not known that there would be such a time, and she did not know what to do when she found that she had reached it. She had come out almost gayly, and now she was trembling. A thousand words pressed to her lips, but she could not speak them, for she knew that if



EVEN THE MOST PROSAIC OF THEM



THE STILL SNOW OF WINTER OR THE FLUTTERING SNOW OF SPRING

she spoke there would be a tremor in her voice.

"Don't try to outwalk me," The Representative said, and drew her back to him. "Are you homesick, too?" he asked.

"Haven't you seen it?" she said. "I have been homesick for so long."

"So long?" said The Representative. "Yes, it does seem long, but really we have only been here a little while."

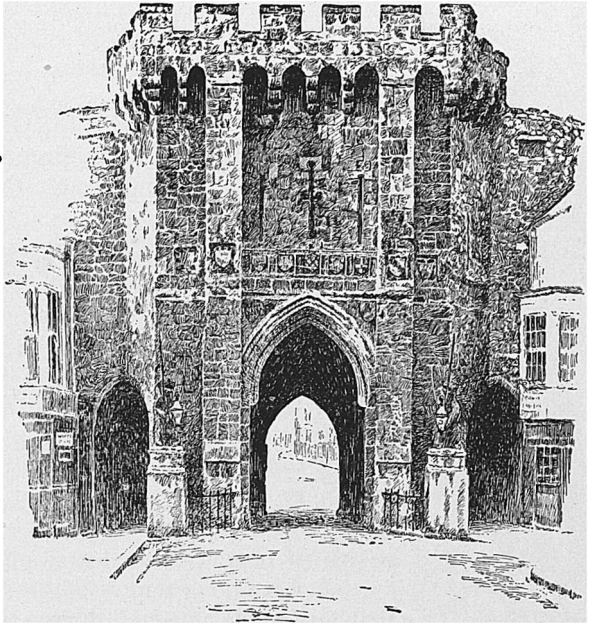
"Oh, you don't know what I mean," she cried, "I wonder if I can make you understand. You have left me alone—I have let you leave me by myself—" but as she looked into his face she

grew compassionate again and strong. She had learned to fully understand, and the sad part of a woman's understanding is the knowledge that she must always be compassionate toward the man she loves.

"I believe you have forgotten," she said, "that it is *I* who am happy and that I am taking you out to show you something that will make you as happy as I am. You have passed it a hundred times without seeing it, so you don't know how little difference there is between this and home."

"I know already that there isn't much difference," said The Representative, and they walked on together in a silence that was the sweetest part of all they said, for The Representative was happy in the new companionship which he thought so old, and his wife was happier than he, having saved herself from telling him how deeply she was sad.

At last they reached an archway through which they could see the light beyond. He looked at it joyfully, and afterward, day after day, they went there together and sometimes they leaned against the archway. They were never homesick and The Foreign Representative did not feel that he was a stranger or had come too late. It was the most beautiful spot he had found in the foreign country, and he called it the vista through the shadow.



THE VISTA THROUGH THE SHADOW

